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# PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993

## Administrative arrangements for the secretariat of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

## Report of the Secretary-General

## Background

1. In section XI, paragraph 3, of General Assembly resolution 46/185 C of 20 December 1991, the Secretary-General was requested "to study the possibility of alternative arrangements for the secretariat of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, including its possible merger with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and to report to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session". The present report summarizes the Secretary-General's views and recommendation.

2. The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) was established by General Assembly resolution 913 (X) of 3 December 1955 in recognition of the widespread concern of countries about the hazards of radioactive fallout disseminating from testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, and of the need to collect and evaluate information on the effects of ionizing radiation on man and his environment. UNSCEAR is composed of the following 21 Member States:

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| Argentina | Indonesia |
| Australia | Japan |
| Belgium | Mexico |
| Brazil | Peru |
| Canada | Poland |
| China | Russian Federation |
| Czechoslovakia | Sudan |
| Egypt | Sweden |
| France | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland |
| Germany | |
| India | United States of America |

3. UNSCEAR's main mandate is to review published reports and technical documents submitted by States Members of the United Nations, the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the sources and effects of ionizing radiation. It evaluates the global exposures of man and assesses the inherent risks of harmful effects. The sources of exposure include the natural radiation background and man-made activities and practices, including nuclear-weapons testing, isotope production and usage, nuclear power production, medical uses of radiation, occupational radiation exposures and accidents. The biological effects of radiation include acute tissue damage from high doses of radiation and late somatic and genetic changes (cancer and heritable defects). The risks of effects are assessed from the findings of radiobiological research and epidemiological studies of radiation-exposed population groups.

4. UNSCEAR is served by a small secretariat, currently consisting of one Professional and two General Service staff members; a second Professional post has not been filled since 1980. Documents for review by UNSCEAR are prepared mainly through consultants who are experts/scientists. This system has allowed versatile selection of expertise and minimum use of financial resources.

5. The secretariat was originally located at Headquarters, in New York. Responsibility for administrative arrangements rested with the Office of the Under-Secretaries-General for Special Political Affairs. Pursuant to a decision taken by the General Assembly on 18 December 1973, the secretariat of UNSCEAR was transferred to Vienna, with effect from 1 January 1974.

6. The initial reason for the transfer to a European headquarters location was to establish links with the newly established secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which was to have a regional office at Geneva, and to assist in establishing environmental monitoring and assessment activities within UNEP by making available UNSCEAR experience. Instead of transferring the Secretariat to Geneva, however, the General Assembly accepted the offer of accommodation made by the Government of Austria. The move to Vienna occurred in September 1974. The offices of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) at Vienna were instrumental in making the necessary arrangements for the transfer and in providing necessary administrative support.

7. In 1976, the secretariat of UNSCEAR was attached to UNEP. This was intended to remove UNSCEAR from the responsibility of the Office of the Under-Secretaries-General for Special Political Affairs and to further cooperation between UNSCEAR and UNEP. The effective date of transfer was 1 September 1976.

8. In accordance with an agreement between the Executive Directors of UNIDO and UNEP, administrative support services for the secretariat were to be provided by UNIDO at Vienna. With the establishment of the United Nations Office at Vienna in 1979, administrative services for UNSCEAR were assumed by the United Nations administrative services at Vienna.

## Possible alternative arrangements

9. The proposal for a possible merger of UNSCEAR secretariat with IAEA, as contained in section XI, paragraph 3, of General Assembly resolution 46/185 C, may have been prompted by the fact that both bodies are based at Vienna and that they are concerned with atomic radiation. However, the proposal must be examined in the light of the differing mandates and approaches, as well as the constitutional structures of the two bodies and the benefits to be derived, as the overall objective of the proposal is the enhancement of effectiveness and efficiency.

10. IAEA is an independent intergovernmental organization. The functions of IAEA are defined in its statute. The relationship between IAEA and the United Nations is governed by the statute of IAEA and the Agreement Governing the Relationship between the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which was approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 1145 (XII) of 14 November 1957.

11. The view of IAEA has been expressed by its Director-General as follows: "UNSCEAR's mandate involves the scientific review and evaluation of the levels and effects of ionizing radiation and is quite distinct from that of the Agency; we believe that to maintain their effectiveness the two organizations should remain separate." 1/

12. At its forty-first session, held at Vienna from 15 to 19 June 1992, UNSCEAR also addressed the issue, and expressed the following view in paragraph 2 of its report to the General Assembly: 2/ "The Committee concluded that alternative arrangements for its secretariat suggested in General Assembly resolution 46/185 C of 20 December 1991 might well prejudice the perception of both its authority and its independence".

13. The position of UNEP in this matter also confirms the view of UNSCEAR and that of IAEA.

14. In the light of the above, the Secretary-General is of the view that, because of differing mandates, a merger of the UNSCEAR secretariat with IAEA could compromise seriously the independent standing of UNSCEAR. The

Secretary-General therefore recommends that the present organizational location and administrative support arrangements for the UNSCEAR secretariat be maintained.

Notes

1/ IAEA Board of Governors, 24 February 1992, GOV/OR.773, para. 43.

2/ A/47/293.

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